

Resenha

Book Review

MADDALENA, Giovanni. *The philosophy of gesture. Completing pragmatists' incomplete revolution*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, p. 195.

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With this well written book Maddalena proposes, in a compelling prose, a new *coup d'état* similar to Kant's "*coup d'état* on philosophical mentality and reasoning" (p. 3), pushing the philosophical inquiry toward a complete synthetic pattern. *The Philosophy of Gesture* presents in fact a new paradigm of synthetic reasoning that considers gestures as the ordinary way in which we carry on meaning of *identity through change*. The word "gesture" is here taken from its Latin origin "*gero*" whose etymology is "I bear", "I carry on" (but also "I produce", "I show", "I represent"). As Maddalena puts it, gesture is "[...] any performed act with a beginning and an end that carries a meaning [...] pragmatically understood as the cluster of conceivable effects of an experience" (p. 69-70). Through a new understanding of the pragmatist tradition, the author attempts to foster "[...] a new, richer way to look at experience as a unity of theory and practice, and a profound realist view of knowledge open to metaphysics" (p. 28), that overhauls the Kantian distinctions between synthetic and analytic reasoning as well as between subject and object.

In the first chapter Maddalena puts the basis for his philosophical pragmatist revolution. In what can be considered the *pars destruens* of the work he exposes the critiques moved by pragmatism to the transcendental philosophy at the basis of the three Kantian key moves: 1) the grounding of Enlightenment's "[...] speculative building on a rationalist pattern of necessity composed by the hierarchical relationship between parts and whole" (p. 4-5); 2) the view of morality according to which true morals is self-consistent autonomous; and 3) the separation between sciences and humanities, mirroring that between *phronesis* and *episteme*. I shall sum up here Peirce's critiques only, for they play the most important in the book. Maddalena highlights Peirce's four attacks to Kant philosophy: 1) to be nominalist, due to Kant's affirming an unbridgeable gap between reality and reason as well as to his misconception of the continuity; 2) Kant's preference for the unity of the logical subject (the "I think") instead of the object, which if recognized would have led Kant to a robust realism; 3) the weakness of the "I think" as guarantee of the unity of the object because of the lack of continuity between cognitive processes and reality; and 4) the separation of the fields of Ethics, Aesthetics and Logic, as opposed to their unification.

The author thence traces the three main topics pragmatists opposed to Kant's philosophy, which are also the philosophical tools of the *pars construens* of the innovative theoretical proposal. The first topic is the *sign*, introduced by Peirce as the tool of a new form of representation centered on the analysis of the relationship between the triad composed of the "object" of reference, the "representamen" (namely, the sign itself), and the "interpretant" (the function of interpretation). Most important is the double characteristic of "[...] hard objectivity and total interpretation" (p. 21). On the one hand there is the distinction, under the name "object", between the dynamic object deep in the flux of reality, and the immediate object—namely, the common object of our representations. According to the author, in this distinction lies the core of Peirce's realism. In fact, our knowledge "[...] always stems from and arrives at the dynamic object, an almost *incomprehensible* object which is at the beginning of our knowledge and at the end of our complete representation" (*Idem*). On the other hand, immediate, dynamical, and final interpretants are "[...] those signs that permit representaments to foster and finish their representative work" (*Ibidem*). Interpretation is therefore part of the sign with respect to an interpretant, and the final interpretant coincides with a "[...] habit of action." Strictly intertwined to the *sign* is the topic of *continuity*, namely "[...] the ontological texture of experience and knowledge, according to the profound unity that defines the concept of pragmatist experience" (p. 23). The third topic is *common sense*, which is logically justified in its grounding on "vagueness," namely in "[...] a state in which the object is indeterminate and would require a further determination by the utterer" (p. 26) and in which the principle of contradiction simply does not hold. "Vague," as opposed to something that is "determinate," "actual" and "general", is a determination through which a "nascent" idea passes from vagueness to generality. Common sense is then the "sensitivity to vagueness" that rational beings have to have.

In the second chapter, the author faces the problematic Kantian distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, in particular with the question about the kind of necessity featuring synthetic judgments built on intuition. Analytic judgments, in fact, are necessary by definition, for they express the principle of identity and are not subject to the principle of contradiction. On the contrary, the uniqueness of space and time "recreates with singular intuitions the schema part-whole" preserving "necessity within the same part-whole scheme that is at work in analytic judgments" (p. 37-38). Kant used therefore analytic tools to define the steps through which we arrive at a synthetic representation of reality, founding again his idea of knowledge upon an analytic pattern.

Maddalena argues that in order to overcome analyticity, a different path of reasoning is needed: namely, a concrete, synthetic way of thinking. In particular, the very possibility of synthetic judgment is provided by Peirce's distinction between mathematical/synthetic (necessary) method and logical/analytic method, through which he tried to find out how necessary and probable inferences are composed, supplemented by "[...] a kind of synthesis in which universals are known in the particulars" (p. 41).

After a propaedeutic exposition of the *status questionis* to justify the innovative but incomplete pragmatists' epistemological revolution and an explanation of the conceptual tools to be used in the new paradigm, in the third chapter Maddalena presents his theoretical proposal, exposing three new definitions for synthetic,

analytic, and vague judgments, which he characterizes as follows: “A synthetic judgment (and reasoning) is a judgment (and reasoning) that recognizes identity through changes” (p. 43); “An analytic judgment (and reasoning) is a judgment (and reasoning) that loses identity through changes” (*Idem*); “A vague judgment (and reasoning) is a judgment (and reasoning) that is blind to identity through changes” (*Ibidem*). Maddalena justifies the new set of definitions arguing that they allow to understand and demonstrate syntheticity of reasoning in accordance with the fundamental hypothesis of continuity. In particular, he points out two aspects of the definitions of the new paradigm: 1) any synthetic judgment “[...] coincides with the operation we have to perform in order to get at it” (p. 46); and 2) synthesis coincides with “recognizing an identity” between two parts of a transitional experience in which judgment is the substantive part (distinguished from the transitive parts as James would hold). The process that leads to the proposition links the initial vague experience to the generalized one of the proposition through a singular action with that determinate part of experience that we call “body.” The identity is always between two experiences of the same relationship(s). Occasionally, the second experience can be formulated by a proposition, but a proposition is only one of its possible realizations that can be more or less complete as any other synthetic action (p. 47).

Maddalena goes on specifying that not just any action is synthetic, and that there are several degrees of synthesis and different kinds of actions which have to be identified through a process of inquiry at the basis of which there are three assumptions based on three pragmatists affirmation: namely, that research is in fact always tied to problem solving and the main problem to solve is the “vagueness of the experience” to determine; our inquiries aim at reaching the core of a belief which involves the establishment of a habit of action; and no proposition can be absolutely final because of its grounding in experience (which is itself never final). Following these definitions and assumptions, the main questions are then: *what* is “change” and *how* can it be studied? To reply to these questions Maddalena refers to the notion of “continuity” approached from both mathematical and logical perspectives, as Peirce did. Continuity is then “[...] a possibility, namely a model that may be realized” (p. 49). Change in continuity is interpreted accordingly “[...] as a perfect continuity of possibilities of which any actual occurrence is a realization” (*Idem*), it is a law (general) “[...] whose internal regularity is “an immediate connection” that we can understand as the condition of every possible realization” (*Ibidem*). Change is thus not a property but rather a *reality* to which existent things belong. Maddalena defines the continuum by four characteristics, already elaborated by Fernando Zalamea (2001), to whom Maddalena refers: *generality*, that is “[...] the law of cohesiveness among parts beyond any individual and any possibility of metrically measuring it” (p. 50); *modality*, “[...] the fact that a continuum is not tied only to actualities but involves also possibility and necessity” (*Idem*); *transitivity*, “[...] the internal passage between modalities” as possibility, actuality, and general necessity (*Ibidem*); and *reflexivity*, “[...] any part shall have the same properties of the whole to which it belongs” (*Ibidem*).

The first approach to study the change in real continuity is through the *logical modalities* of possibility, actuality, and necessity accounting for transition within the continuum itself. As Maddalena sums up, possibility is “the may be’s”, namely

“[...] the mode of reality in which the principle of contradiction does not hold” (p. 51); actuality is the existence, namely “[...] the mode of reality in which both the principle of contradiction and the excluded third hold” (p. 51-52); necessity is “[...] the mode of reality in which the principle of the excluded third does not hold, namely “[...] the state of things that “would be” true, if certain conditions happened” (p. 52). Logical modalities describe reality through the transition in determination from vagueness (that is something “particular”) to determination (“singular”) and generality (“universal”). Vagueness is, according to this approach, the main character of our beliefs and acritical inferences. Abductive inferences have often to rely upon vague characters, and vague characters are the first degree of clarity, distinguished from “determination” which is match with definition, and from “generality” which is match with the pragmatic maxim. Thus, “change” as well as “changing something” is “[...] a continuous reality in continuous transition among modalities” (p. 54), whereas our synthetic reasoning is about recognizing identity through change.

The second approach to “change” is the *existential graphs*. It is important to note that according to Peirce, and to the synthetic way of reasoning, “working” is the necessary and sufficient condition of reality. And since in mathematics we deal with universals in particulars, “doing mathematics” through scribing graphs and diagrams, that is to perform “mathematical gestures” through which imagining hypothesis and drawing from them necessary conclusions, means already dealing with the reality of universals. Generally speaking, *existential graphs* are the basic iconic level of relationship with the dynamic reality and it is accordingly the original “evidence” of change through continuity for their being moving pictures of thought which represent “[...] the creation of explanatory conjectures” (p. 56). The basic idea is that the *conclusion of a synthetic reasoning is perceived in all its generality*, and that the existential graphs are synthetically conveying universals into singulars. The generalization is the analytic result of the diagrams which are “[...] the synthetic happening of generals” (p. 57). The process of “re-cognizing” the identity through changes is part of this happening, and coincides with the drawing of the line which is the acceptance of the original identity of two points that are distant but the same. Identity therefore means no longer $A=A$, but a non-purely-symbolizable iconic identity passing from A to B. This implies a switch to scribing the line of identity upon a multidimensional continuum, transforming the identity in a *teridentity*, which is a line representing two relations of co-identity. Identity is thence “[...] the continuity of possibilities of an individual considered to be a changing object in its becoming” (p. 61). Now, according to Maddalena, who follows in this Peirce, the line of teridentity is a “perfect continuum” along with the multidimensional continuum of assertion. Identity means identity of an *aspect* of an individual, which is a “[...] variety of presentation and representation” (MS 300:46-47), whose time and space are just two of the possibilities. A line of identity is a “perfect sign” all parts of which “[...] are possibilities that might be realized according to a general law” (p. 65), becoming more and more determinate (and thus, in the long run, necessary) within the continuum in which they are inscribed. What has to be noted is that the iconic level of teridentity is the most important for it shows the Forms and Feelings of the synthesis of the elements of thought as a continuum of dots. And the identity seen under two aspects “[...] consists merely in the continuity of being passing from one apparition to another” (CP 4.448).

In the fourth chapter the notion of “complete gesture” is introduced. A gesture is, as said at the beginning of this review, a performed act with a beginning and an end that carries a meaning pragmatically understood. Maddalena specifies that “gesture” has to be considered in a much broader than as a mere bodily articulation, that is as “[...] a completion of reasoning and communication in which words can cooperate” (p. 171n). In such completion, which is the performing of the synthetic reasoning and the “[...] original form of comprehension/communication” (p. 75) from which any other form can be derived, we transform our vague comprehension into a habit of action. He distinguishes between complete (namely perfect) and incomplete gestures, for not just any gesture is synthetic but only those respecting the characters of evidence, generalization, continuity, and “[...] an equal blending of kinds of signs” as well as of phenomena (p. 70). From a semiotic perspective a complete gesture has to have a *general* meaning so as to be a general law for replicas (symbol); *actual* (index) when indicates singular object; expressing different *possibilities* of forms and feelings (icon). These semiotic characters of gesture need to be reflected in the phenomenological relations of *firstness*, namely a pure idea or a pure feeling, *secondness* (a physical act involving reactions of two objects or subjects), and *thirdness* (generality). Examples of complete gestures are liturgies, rites, artistic performances and hypothesizing experiments. What Maddalena wants to point out here is the internal *telos* that the phenomenological and semiotic paths reveal (at pain of making continuity unintelligible), namely “[...] the tendency to generalize that every gesture requires as such for the dynamic of its elements (thirdness and symbols)” (p. 73). A singular person who performs a singular act is embodying a general rule according to certain interpretation, creating a “necessary” habit of action which will be fostered in a re-performance involving “a replica of the feelings” (p. 80). The gesture becomes actual only inasmuch as a person is actualizing it. That singular action modifies the generality proposing new habits (or new ways of old habits). Generalization is granted by the possibility that a complete gesture is “accomplished by many”.

The fifth chapter titled “Gestures and Creativity” specifies the kind of function the complete gestures have in our knowledge. Synthetic reasoning is always a creative form of reasoning, however the creative synthetic blending of semiotic elements has some necessary conditions, first of all, a “sub-creation”, namely an author who puts the complete gesture into existence. The second element is “assent” which coincides with the interpretant, namely “[...] the outcome of the sign in a determination of the interpreter’s mind (including all non-human minds)” (p. 96). Assent is thence “[...] the condition through which our complete gesture becomes operatively meaningful” (*Idem*). The third element is the “normative appeal”, namely the ethical dimension involved in assent. A hypothesis might be possible but not plausible, that is not convenient to realize because it lies outside the range of effective possibility. If so, then the ethical statement is “[...] something that has to deal with the effective world” (p. 98). The voluntary act at the basis of ethics judgment is related to the knowledge of the end of the act. This knowledge, however, has not to be found within ethics but rather in aesthetics: it must be an *admirable ideal* “[...] into which our complete gestures, like our analytic reasoning, have to fit and with which they cooperate to propose, to enhance, and to foster” (p. 100). The ultimate immutable aim is an aim consistent with human freedom and “concrete reasonableness”, namely the

human reason in its “embodiment”. What Maddalena foresees in the apex of Peirce’s doctrine of “embodiment” is what a complete synthetic pattern would be, namely the emerging of concrete reasonableness as the order that any sort of reality must have to be understood. This means, pragmatically, a progressive approach to a final recognition, to the “truth” understood as the result of inquiry in the long run. Now, the problem is that Peirce did not explain what concrete reasonableness consists in. However, as Maddalena argues in the final chapter, even if pragmatists see ethics as normative, they also understand this normativity as linked to a posteriori knowledge. And knowledge is always tied up with complete gestures (p. 138).

In the sixth and seventh chapters Maddalena tries to derive solutions to such classic theoretical topics as personal identity and artistic creativity from the complete synthetic pattern and gesture. The first characteristic of the recognition of identity is that multidimensional continuum and the line of identity expressed in the existential graphs are lodged within the person’s experience. To find out the possibility to connect one complete gesture to another Maddalena refers to Auerbach’s notion of “figurality” derived from Latin “figura”, namely “[...] something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical” (p. 114). Working with the idea of a “[...] recognition of identity through changes” we can see the figure as the form of the object at an iconic level and its actualization at an indexical level (examples of the latter level are proper names and pronouns). Figurality among complete gestures, that is not a mere similarity between two figures, seems to describe what happens with memory, and establishes also a path of future realization, which will be another figure in our ongoing process.

The last chapter is dedicated to tackle the Kantian legacy regarding the conception of morality. Maddalena refers again to vagueness and common sense, arguing that common sense is the kind of reality that we receive or in which we are immersed, it is applied to fundamental ways of thinking and enters in any “reconstruction” of reality: common sense is our first acknowledgment of experience, it is our inherited morality which is vague, although its vagueness is a proof of its importance and reality. Now, as synthetic gestures transform themselves into habits of actions, giving rise to new interpretations, tradition and reconstruction are two poles of the same developing whole. As Maddalena argues, “[...] any action, bad action included, can be moral insofar as it embodies its vague initial idea and its general final ideal” (p. 145). Thence, if meaning is increased and modified by complete gestures, can general aims change during the process of performing gestures? The problem concerns the subject of the ethical judgment. To respond to this question Maddalena indicates in the “rational instinct” the esthetical-ethical-logical function of the faculty of judgment at the core of the complete gesture. However he does not succeed to link the function of judgment to an ontological self, because, as he argues, the question about the ontological self “[...] goes beyond the limit of the complete gesture tool and the model of reasoning based on it” (p. 149).

With *The Philosophy of Gesture* Maddalena depicts an innovative epistemic tool for our everyday reasoning, opening a whole new horizon of research in various fields, from theoretical philosophy to ethics, from psychology to the social sciences. The potentialities are really vast: think for example of the interesting application of this tool to the hypothesis about the ways in which individuals develop their “choice process” in various fields of conduct (e.g., politics, economics, laws, ethics, etc.).

There are, however, some critical comments that I hope would be productive to foster the debate about the new paradigm proposed. First of all, Maddalena refers to Dewey and Mead as the pragmatists who used the notion of gesture before him. It is however questionable to refer to those authors for they did not use the word “gesture” in the same way Maddalena does in his book. According to Mead gestures are truncated acts representing in their original forms the first overt phases in social acts that stimulate certain response. The function of gesture is then the mutual adjustment of changing social response to changing social stimulation. On the contrary, the gesture in Maddalena’s proposal assumes a more complex function, namely that of representing a synthetic reasoning which creates new habits. What is partially common to the two different perspectives is the social function that gestures have in the changing evolution of dispositions to act at the basis of the changing of complex habits. However, in my opinion it would be better to distinguish more clearly the word “gesture” that Maddalena uses from Mead’s and Dewey’s “gesture” to avoid misunderstandings and false comparisons.

There are also some doubts that could be raised about the way in which, in the third chapter of his book, Maddalena refers to the iconic level of teridentity as the level that shows the Forms and Feelings of the synthesis of elements of thought consisting merely in the continuity of being passing from one apparition to another. One of such doubts being that to refer to representation and presentation as “aspects”, and to different aspects as two “apparitions” reintroduce in the paradigm Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon. As Maddalena highlights, there is a permanence of something, “[...] a part of experience lingers while its representation evolves” (p. 66). However, in speaking about reality as something changing in aspects only, Maddalena seems to conflate the phenomenon/noumenon distinction with the substantive/transitive distinction.

The second doubt is strictly related to the first and concerns the reference to the “Forms of the synthesis” and to the analytic composition of gesture synthesis. In my opinion, in referring to such forms Maddalena revokes through singular gestures (instead of Kantian intuitions) the schema part/whole, preserving necessity within the same part/whole scheme that is at work in analytic judgments, hence referring again to analyticity. Moreover, regarding the changing of aspects, the continuity of being as “passing from one apparition to another” has to be considered as the passage from a discrete to another discrete, which is possible to define only analytically. To sum up, it seems to me that as Kant uses analytic tools to define the steps through which we arrive to a synthetic representation of reality, Maddalena uses analytic tools to expose the steps through which we recognize a synthetic reasoning. So, if the gesture is the synthetic performance of continuity, the latter can be known only a posteriori through an analytic process. Even if we accept synthetic reasoning through the tool of gesture as the core of new knowing processes, we need analyticity to re-cognize and comprehend that gesture as synthetic reasoning. In other words, in exposing and describing the elements that compose the synthetic reasoning expressed through logical modalities and mathematical gesture Maddalena is repeating the same analytic process Kant sketched in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. We therefore witness a reconstruction of both the analytic/synthetic and phenomenon/noumenon distinctions as two essential parts of the experience processes.

It is possible to partially respond to these doubts by arguing that the analysis of elements composing the synthetic reasoning is always a posteriori, differently from Kant's affirmation that analytic judgments are always a priori. And as there is no *primum cognitum*—as Peirce stated in the context of his criticism of intuition—we have to conclude that synthetic and analytic reasoning are two sides of the same process: namely, experience. Maddalena's pragmatist proposal aims for the unity of experience, as it “[...] stems from experience and aims to another more general and embodied experience” (p. 67). This approach shows that gestures as “[...] the embodied way to represent or recognize identity are different from the two main representations of identity: identity as permanence of attributes and identity as dialectic” (p. 113). Moreover, Maddalena argues about the clarity of knowledge that to know “[...] something in a vague way [...] is the beginning of any definition and any gesture” (p. 82). This means that our reasoning is like a “swinging pendulum”, with the extreme syntheticity of complete gesture on the one side, and the extreme analysis of formal logic on the other. Vague reasoning is “[...] an intermediate kind of reasoning through which we pass from one extreme to the other” (p. 83). However, even if in Maddalena's view analyticity is always a posteriori, in my opinion the question remains and needs further analysis.

A last doubt concerns the problem of the nature of the subject of ethical judgment. Even though Maddalena refers to “rational instinct” as the esthetical-ethical-logical function of the faculty of judgment at the core of the complete gesture, the question with the ontological self is here related to that of personal identity. And even though Maddalena admits that the question “[...] goes beyond the limit of the complete gesture tool and the model of reasoning based on it” (p. 149), it remains an open question which according to me calls for an idea of the subject that cannot be considered only as function, for otherwise we fall back into the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon. I think that gesture, by being related to the way reasoning functions, can indeed offer the solution. Interpreting the final aim as reasonableness calls out the postulation of a final aim of Nature (similar to what Kant did in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*) in which the subject plays a crucial part. Here a metaphysical background is called for to make the aesthetic the first normative science. However, to presuppose a metaphysical background implies also to partially define the subject legitimated to interpret a gesture as complete or incomplete and to understand the admirableness of “the ultimate aim” through a “transcendental” scheme. However, who or what can be legitimated as the final interpretant of a plausible gesture? Is it really possible to define a “normative” schema through which determine the plausibility of gesture, even a posteriori? Peirce's and Maddalena's referring to *Summum Bonum* is paradigmatic to the response they give. From their perspective any performed gesture would be seen at the end, from the “ultimate aim's” perspective, namely the “admirable ideal” as a sign of a final cosmological order, in which human reasonableness will be totally “unfolded”. The problem to face with is, however: how can free will act as the source of singular creative synthetic reasoning in this framework? Have we to judge it only a posteriori, which is analytically?

I think that a possible furthering of inquiries in the new theoretical paradigm proposed by Maddalena would need to pay attention to the nature of synthetic reflective judgment Kant tackles in his third *Critique*. In particular it would help

to develop Peirce's aesthetics, whose comments are brief and inconsistent (a first attempt has been made by Atkins 2008 in *Cognitio*). I think it would be a good starting point to reach a new definition of a broader judgment than the logical judgment, one involving the relationship of a gesture to the realm of existence, which would help to understand whether a particular complete gesture is worthwhile. Strictly related to this new way of considering judgment would be a renewed attention to the Kantian's *sensus communis*, which would help thinking the distinction between synthetic and analytic in new light. Obviously, this new attention would call for a rejection of the Kantian confinement of common sense to aesthetic judgments and a broader attention to what Kant called *sensus communis logicus*, namely the sense affecting the judgments of the intellect. Common sense as the a priori principle of the possibility of judgment on experience in general is also closely linked to the notion of finality, which in Kant assumes the meaning of a "purpose of nature", but could also be declined pragmatically in the teleological perspective of synthetic gestures.

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